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SUBJECT: SPECIAL ENVOY: CIVILIANS TO AFGHANISTAN STILL A
WORK IN PROGRESS

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Classified By: Pol/Econ Counselor Edgard D. Kagan, reasons 1.4 (b)(d)

Summary

1. (C/NF) Special Envoy for Afghanistan and Pakistan Ric Smith told us that the Australian government has yet to agree upon specific numbers for the recently announced expansion of its civilian effort in Afghanistan. Smith, who seemed less enthusiastic and engaged than in past meetings, said that the new deployments are likely to include about 5 additional diplomats, around 10 AusAID personnel, and 10 to 20 officers from the Australian Federal Police. He predicted that the numbers would be firmed up early in 2010 but would not be approved by the Cabinet until February. Smith was not sure that a plan would be finalized by the January 18 AUSMIN meeting, where the Australians expect us to raise this issue. The delay in defining this policy may signal disagreement within the government as to what the civilian presence in Afghanistan should look like. END SUMMARY.

Civilian Commitment Not Finalized

2. (C/NF) In a December 15 meeting Smith told us the government has yet to settle on the exact size and makeup of its "civilian surge" in Afghanistan. Prime Minister Kevin Rudd announced his plans to send more civilians to Afghanistan during a recent visit to Washington. Smith believed that Rudd would like to send upwards of 50 civilians, but expected the final numbers to be considerably lower than that. Smith told us to expect that the civilian expansion would include about 5 additional diplomats to be stationed at a new Australian Embassy in Kabul, 10 AusAID personnel, and 10 to 20 Australian Federal Police (AFP) officers.

3. (C/NF) According to Smith, plans for sending additional civilians will not be finalized until early in 2010. Afghanistan Section Director Paul Noonan noted that the first meeting of the National Security Committee, which would likely have the final say on any proposal, is not scheduled to meet again until February of next year. Smith and Noonan both did expect, however, that the broad outlines of the policy will be in place in time for the AUSMIN meeting on January 18, when the Australians are anticipating that we will raise this issue. It is likely that they will be able to provide more details at that time, but the composition of the civilian effort will not be finalized until February at the earliest.

Smith Increasingly Pessimistic

14. (C/NF) In earlier meetings, Smith was positive about the expansion of the civilian effort, but in the most recent meeting he struck a more pessimistic tone. Smith hinted at some ADF reservations about the government's plans, noting that ADF commanders "on the ground" were skeptical of the greater security commitments a larger civilian presence would entail. Smith also questioned the utility of the AFP police training mission. He doubted what police trainers could accomplish given the "train wreck" that they have been given to work with in the Afghan police force. Smith also stated his belief that civilians, while important, would not be the difference between success and failure in Afghanistan. He said that the focus on the lack of a civilian presence in Afghanistan feels to him as though someone is looking for a scapegoat.

Policy Contingent on Dutch

15. (C/NF) Smith also noted that Australia will be unable to finalize plans until the Dutch announce what their future involvement in Oruzgan Province will look like. The Dutch intend to pull out of Oruzgan, where nearly all of the Australian troops in Afghanistan are located, in August, but Smith does not believe that this decision is final. As Australian civilians currently rely in part on the Dutch military for force protection, any increase in civilians is contingent upon whether the Dutch withdrawal as planned and who will take their place if they do. Smith hopes that the Dutch will remain in Oruzgan in some capacity. He was

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dismissive of proposed plans to spread Dutch forces throughout Afghanistan rather than concentrate them, saying this will only increase the costs and decrease the impact of the Dutch force. If the Dutch do pull out, Australia would need to consider altering the makeup of its force in Afghanistan, putting a greater emphasis on security.

Comment

16. (C/NF) The Australian government had hoped to roll-out its planned expansion of the civilian effort in Afghanistan shortly after President Obama's speech announcing the way forward, but the formulation of the plan is taking longer than expected. Rudd, who is loath to increase troop levels, had hoped to offer the increased civilian effort to the United States as a substitute. The Australians began preparing for the President's announcement months in advance and the lack of progress is surprising. Coupled with Smith's increasingly pessimistic attitude, this may be a sign of friction within the government over the proper role for civilians in Afghanistan.

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